The Skipper's Honor

By John Fleming Wilson

THE steam coaster Gracie Jackson was lost. She had strayed out of the Columbus River on a thick morning in November, bound for San Francisco. Three days had passed since then, and on this dull forenoon she tumbled wildly in a jobble of sea somewhere off the Oregon coast, the crew knew not where. In her cramped saloon the skipper and mate were asleep, asleep beyond the power of the frightened sailors to awake. The chief engineer had come up from below to assist in the process of rousing them, but after a half-hour's vain attempt he now stood back against the bulkhead easing his mind. "They're a couple of sots," he explained to the drawn-faced bos'n. "The old man started lushing before we were across the bar, and the mate ain't been sober for a week. I don't believe those two seacooks have even got their departure chalked down. I know they ain't wrote a line in the log since we passed Tillamook a-bellowing in the fog. Drunk! Drunk!——" and the engineer and the bos'n lifted up their voices in a sea blessing, deep, vociferous and mighty.

"I reckon we're off Cape Blanco somewhere," suggested a sailor who had stamped in. "It's running an ugly sea, too. Thicker'n pea soup, and the glass way down. What'll we do, sir?"

The engineer grunted with the wrath of two sleepless days. Then he stumbled up the companionway to the deck, and the bos'n shuffled after him. Forward in the wheelhouse they found a grim-visaged seaman clinging hungrily to the jerking wheel, and peering out from the compass to the gray, frothing ocean that seemed to have risen like a cloud of hissing steam about the Gracie Jackson. There was no twinkle of the sun, and the howling wind drove the vapor across the plunging decks in huge billows. A boat, crushed and broken, lay wabbling under the weather rail. Aft the humming funnel spun a sooty thread against the low cloud. All this the engineer took in with a sweeping glance. Then he looked back on the chart shelf at the slate. A clumsy hand had chalked tentative reckonings on it and the barometer and log readings. There was no attempt, however, to fix the position of the steamer on the chart pinned beneath. The engineer swore gruffly, and then abruptly departed by the lee door, to return holding in his hand a copy of his own log. The bos'n joined him, and they puzzled, and figured, and cursed till noon. "It's no use," said the engineer, after a final wrestle. "We can't get bottom with the lead; we ain't an observation of any sort to go on; we ain't even got an approximate distance logged. We might be off San Diego or the Sahara Desert so far's we know."

"How much we making now?" asked the sailor at the wheel.

"Seven by the engines," was the reply. "Five by the log. May be going astern for all that."

"I reckon," continued the helmsman, slowly — "I reckon we're about off Blanco. How much coal we got?"

"Sixteen hours' this gait."

There was a long pause, filled only with the harsh noises of the ocean and the laboring vessel. Then the man at the wheel, as he eased the Gracie over a crested surge, muttered an oath and besought his Creator to show no mercy to the stupored men in the saloon.

"We've got to do something," said the bos'n, practically. "I guess Cap'n Flint ain't coming to to-day, and the mate's worse off yet. We got to get sail on her to steady her and fetch somewhere mighty quick. When we're short of coal the foresail and staysail ought to take us along."

The engineer thought awhile, and then turned brusquely to the bos'n. "I'm in command here," he said. "Put some sail on her and get out to sea somewhere. We ain't going to risk it inshore this weather. I'll save my coal for a pinch. You take command on deck, and I'll keep watch with you soon as I shut my dampers and get all snug below."

The bos'n nodded and slipped out on deck. He took his chance and ran forward and disappeared. When he emerged again from the tiny fo'c'le it was with three men at his heels. They regained the pilot house and received their orders. "We've got to fetch in somewhere," finished the bos'n, sourly. "It's up to us to do it by dead reckoning. At least we can keep off a lee shore. Maybe by to-morrow they (he pointed a scornful thumb over his shoulder) will be wise enough to take a sight and navigate the ship. Keep your eyes open and don't let her get away from you."

So the Gracie Jackson came into the hands of her untutored crew, and while the skipper and his mate slumbered on the saloon deck the thread of smoke ceased to blow from her slender funnel and two sails were set to give her steerage way. Thus she swung drunkenly on her unknown course, staggering, pitching, reeling through the beaded seas. Afternoon dimmed into dusk; swirling fog and wind wreathed her and smothered her till the men at the wheel craned their necks in vain to catch a glimpse of the waves that roared in the darkness, or foamed over the rail and beat her dumbly down till the crew clung dizzily to each other, and swore blasphemously that they had seen their last dawn.

Night blanketed the ocean and mocked the scanty beams of the lights. The watery stream poured hoarsely through the whistle as the bos'n pulled the cord in dread of an answer from the invisible. The gale rose and thundered in the sails till the rigging tautened to the breaking point. The engineer stood by the helmsman and prayed that he might be spared again to hear the throb of his engines in the ship's bowels. Other times he exhorted his assistant to keep up steam enough for the whistle and pumps. Then when the strain was too great they suddenly fell to talking shrilly. In the end they started the engines again, and by the aid of a headsail kept the almost uncontrollable steamer from falling into the trough and foundering. "It's all off 'f we don't make some port t'night," said the engineer when the dawn glimmered. "M' coal's a'most gone, an' m' engines 'r teetering on th' plates, 'nd th' drunks 're drunkeener 'n ever."

"We ought 'a' throwed the liquor over the side," mumbled the bos'n through lips bleeding from the stinging brine. "I thought they were too full to lush any more."

"Steward 'nd me just tried t' wake 'em up," the engineer went on. "'Nd the mate's past talking still."

"I reckon it 'ud do us a heap of good to have a drink of that same," growled a sailor, with avidity.

"No you don't!" yelled the bos'n, distractedly. "No liquor for you. Ain't we 'ad enough?"

"The pit's wide open for them guzzlers," said the engineer in chilly rage. "The old man was a good sort till the mate got a-hold of him. The mate always was a bad one, anyhow."

"So he was," assented the bos'n. "The old man always stuck right by him, though. Always held him his job. Always stood between him and the fellows ashore that wanted to fire him. Always said he was a smart seaman, and never let on to the owners that he drank. Now he's got his pay, and we're drawing it along of him. Look at that!"

The group looked as the bos'n sprang to the aid of the man at the wheel. A huge boiling wave rose straight up out of the ocean and soared in black majesty while the Gracie Jordan wallowed helplessly and her emptied sail slatted uselessly. Still obedient to her helm the little steamer turned sullenly to mount this precipice of water. She thrust her nose into its huge flank, and then, as the weight of it throttled her, the men in the pilot house threw themselves together on the wheel and clung there.

The bos'n was the first to get back his power of speech. "We're going ashore!" he shouted.

The engineer looked a question, and a sailor tossed him an explanation. "That was a breaker in shallow water."

As they waited for the next, while the engineer yelled down the engine room speaking tube, the door leading from the cabin opened. It showed the gray, sodden face of the mate. They did not greet him. He stepped slowly in, and they saw that he was wringing wet. He slid across the deck to the plunge of the ship and pushed his face out of the window. The day had come in gloom, and the gray mist and driving scud shut all view a few yards from the side. From the welter to windward rose another wall of hissing water and fell crashing on the decks of the Gracie Jackson. The mate's face flushed, and he dragged the men, thrown down by the impact, to their feet. Then he seized the wheel and motioned to the engineer to approach. "Steam!" he ordered, thickly. "We're goin' ashore. Steam!"

The throb of the engines changed to a steady beat, and the steamer found herself for an instant. The mate handed the wheel over to the bos'n and a sailor and tore off his jacket and shirt till he stood before them naked to the waist. Then jumping between them with a thundered order he drove the spokes around and the Gracie bucked over a low, scudding wave that had sucked her down till the brine bubbled in over the sill of the pilot house doors.

For an hour the steamer held her own under the awakened skill and strength of the mate. Then something in the engine room clattered and crashed; a cloud of steam whirled up from the after skylight. The coaster rolled helplessly in the trough of the sea. Almost immediately the engineer, followed by his assistant and a couple of firemen, tumbled on deck and scampered for shelter. "Wheel gone and engine's lifted cylinder heads off," explained the engineer, wiping his eyes with a piece of waste. "God ha' mercy on us."

But the half naked mate was forward with his men getting more sail set. The effort was vain, for a few minutes later a heavy sea swept her fore and aft, tossed her skyward and let her fall into a turmoil of broken water that foamed over the rail. A long line of crested breakers rose from the sea and hurried her, pelted her, thrust her toward the invisible shore.

She struck, and the masts and funnel toppled to leeward. Under the mate's directions the crew set to work to free a boat lashed on the forward deck. With a mighty effort they finally cleared it, lifted it to the rail, and by the aid of a floating wave launched it, half full of water. The fog was rent for an instant by the blast of the gale, and they saw stretching from the reef on which the Gracie Jackson was pounding a smooth sheet of water rolling gently shoreward from the caldron of the breakers. The mate pointed to it. They understood. As the coaster settled heavily again on the bottom, the sailors, led by the engineer, tumbled into the boat, one by one. The mate yelled to them to pull away. The answer was a cry: "The skipper?" He caught its purport and disappeared in the saloon companionway. Squatting on the rocking deck the captain idiotically watched the antics of a big saltcellar rolling about before him as the steamer wallowed. When the mate entered he looked up, and then his eyes reverted to the frollicking piece of ware on the writhing deck. A gap opened in the planks and the water sucked through nosily. Another strain of the wreck and the gap yawned wider and the saltcellar was swallowed up. The old man watched with fascinated eyes.

The mate shook him roughly by the shoulder. An oath answered him. He dragged the drunkard to his feet and held him swaying there till both lurched dizzily to the deck. The mate got up again and strove to put life into his superior. Then in his passion he shrieked in the dull ears the truth of their state.

The captain mumbled and his face took on the livid complexion of terror. Then reeling to the steps he scrambled out on deck with the mate at his heels. As they thrust their heads out in the air a wave washed them back. The mate shoved on, pushed his captain out on the careening deck, and then swiftly dragged him to the pilot house, unroofed by the last breaker. The men in the boat, now almost swamped, shrieked another call. The skipper looked down at them as the Gracie Jackson rolled over on the reef, and clutched at something to hold him while he hastened to the boat. The mate caught him back thrust him against a stanchion and waved his hand to the upturned faces below. "Pull away!" he ordered.

"The captain!" bawled the engineer. "Lemme go! Lemme go!" cried the captain. "Lemme go! We're wrecked!"

The mate looked seaward. A long, sharply crested comber was rising out a little, and as it sped in toward the reef, he knew the imminent doom. He turned to save the man who had saved him. "That boat's overloaded," he said, tensely. "Tell 'em to pull away!"

A flash of courage lit the old man's degradation. He threw out his hand and gathered his voice into a command that rose above the tumult of the sea. In response the boat swept shoreward from under the crumbling steamer and into the smooth waters in the shelter of the reef. The mate turned to his superior. It was his last report. "Boat's away, sir. Shall we give 'em a cheer?"

Captain Flint raised his hand, and the half-naked man beside him stepped forward a little. About the plunging roar of the breaker that ended forever the Gracie Jackson, the men toiling to safety in the overloaded boat heard a feeble cheer.

The bos'n held up his arm an instant. His face was reverent. "The old man give us a cheer, mates," he said, hoarsely. "Give 'im one for goin' like a man."

And, to the great peril of their frail craft riding in unstill waters, the crew of the Gracie Jackson rested on their oars to bellow a last salute to the captain perishing on the reef.

The skipper's honor was saved.—Argonaut.

Advertises For Dandies.

The Tailor and Cutter, the official journal of England's tailors, is advertising for twelve good-looking men that can wear clothes. They are wanted to help a movement which has been started to induce men to wear clothes more picturesque than the present sombre garments.

TOAST CURE.

Toast is a diet that will be found most helpful for people suffering from indigestion. Not toast made in the ordinary way, with soggy insides and scorched outsides, but bread that has been thoroughly dried in the oven and toasted to a golden brown.

If there is an invalid in the house suffering from indigestion, have this instead of bread at every meal. Even second day bread is not dry enough for a delicate stomach.

This is a simple thing to try, and may help the worst sufferer. In many cases good results have been rapid and satisfactory from a diet of this kind.—New York American.

INDIAN BEAD WORK.

I watched an Indian woman doing the native bead work, which has become such a fad everywhere. Every time she dipped her needle in the plate of tiny beads a bead slid up the hair-like bit of steel and clung there as if it had been glued into place. Occasionally the needle held twenty or thirty beads, which never came slipping off, as mine had a habit of doing. I asked her why. She looked inscrutable and dipped the needle in a small bottle of water which stood at her elbow. That was the secret; the moistened needle made the beads stick together as well as stay on the needle. I tried it and now am able to do beading twice as quickly as before.—Good Housekeeping.

AN OCTOGENARIAN QUEEN.

One of the most interesting and charming old ladies in Europe is the ex-Queen Marie of Hanover, who, at the age of eighty-five, is now living a quet and peaceful life in a villa at Gmunden, close to the castle of her son, the Duke of Cumberland. Her pathetic devotion to her husband, George V. of Hanover, in his blindness and misfortunes has found its reward in the loving care bestowed on her by her son and daughters in her declining years. One of these daughters, Princess Mary, lives with her; the other, Princess Frederica, resides chiefly at Bairritz for the sake of her health, but pays long visits to her mother from time to tim., says Home Notes.

The Princess Frederica is one of the many royal personages who have made morganatic marriages. With the full approval of Queen Victoria, her cousin, she was married at Windsor to Baron von Pawel Rammingen, on April 24, 1880, and for some years after that lived at Hampton Court Palace in an apartment granted her by the Queen. She is a very handsome, gifted and charming woman, and her kindness, in opening bazaars and in patronizing all sorts of charitable undertakings, is well known and greatly appreciated.—New York Evening Telegram.

JAPANESE HAND WARMERS.

If you drop into a shop where Japanese novelties are for sale and see some curious perforated objects that look like "mouth organs" planned on Oriental lines, don't make the mistake of buying them for musical instruments. They are kiros, or Japanese hand warmers.

In the country of the Mikado they don't believe in suffering from cold hands and knees, and the kiro is simply a portable stove that one can tuck away in his pocket when not needed. It is a simple contrivance, and can be put inside a pair of large mittens. Sometimes they are fastened to the knees to keep the legs from getting cold. Persons out driving or speeding in an auto need not get frostbitten toes and fingers if they use kiros.

Fuel suitable for use comes with the kiro. Enough can be purchased for fifteen cents to last two months. It is a curious preparation of charcoal, and gives off little gas and no smoke. In Japan those who have to work out of doors in cold weather carry several kiros inside their clothing and are able to face the lowest temperatures.

Many who have used this small Japanese stove in the sick room boast that it is much superior to hot water bags for cold feet or to apply where pain is felt. A hot water bag is heavy, is unwieldy to handle, and its temperature is bound to fall.

But the Japanese stoves are small and light. They can be put right on the spot where the pain is, and do not press or weigh too heavily on the afflicted part. The heat is steady, thoroughly warm, but never unpleasantly hot, and one piece of fuel lasts two hours, and is unvarying as to the quantity of heat thrown out. In fact, they are very convenient and effective additions to the housekeeper's store.

HINTS FOR A NURSE.

A nurse should always wear washdresses, and this is especially necessary if she is to care for a young infant. If the conventional black dress is to be worn, it is best to have it made of satine or other washable material. Also, it is very necessary that no pins should be about the waist or belt. Many an ugly scratch on baby's soft little cheek is due to a pretty pin in the nurse's collar.

When taking her charge out the nurse should receive strict orders never to go to other houses, nor to take the child among other children unknown to the parents. Not only bad language and wrong ideas, but serious illness are often due to association with chance street acquaintances.

Upon her return from her day off or a visit to her people, the nurse should be required to change her dress before taking the baby. This precaution will, to some extent, lessen the danger of contagion if the nurse has been exposed to any childish ailment during her absence.

She must never allow strangers to kiss or pet her charge. Orders upon this point cannot be too emphatic or too rigidly enforced. The custom of teaching a child to kiss every one he meets is pernicious in the extreme. Older people are rarely healthy enough to kiss babies in any case, and it should not be encouraged.—New York News.

Everybody is doing cross-stitch in these days. Classes in this kind of embroidery, which is more highly paid for than any other at present, are being started at the Settlements and Young Women's Christian associations.

Onions, eaten raw, with bread and butter, make a capital complexion clearer, and nightcap, especially for the nervous person, who is generally inclined to lie awake o' nights and to wake up at dishearteningly early hours of the morning.

Miss Mary L. Rogers, of Pawtucket, R. I., a graduate of Wellesley and the new teacher in the high school, knocked out the captain of the football team with a blow on the nose and landed twice on the eyes of his confederate, who assisted at "br-akiug her in."

A prominent complexion specialist, writing in the Woman's Home Companion, has placed herself on record as advising women to powder even at home. Powder is essential to American women, he thinks, on account of the perpetual changes of climate and the dust and dirt in the atmosphere.

Nowhere is the woman doctor more in evidence than in Russia. In 1897 Russia had 997 women doctors, and the number constantly increases. In this profession Russian women have made a distinguished name. They have enormous practices in the great towns, and are largely employed by the municipalities.

The woman who has left her first youth behind can be as charmingly "hatted" to-day as she who possesses more youthful charms, because the new improved turban toque in various shades of chenille and velvet, with long coque feather plumes turned up at one side, broad and high, is one of the most becoming shapes it is possible to create for a face of maturer years.

Plain waists of dyed lace are well to buy to wear with skirts of a matching color.

Very tiny rosettes of contrasting chiffon are a favored trimming idea for lace jabots.

The most stunning ornament for wavy tresses is a twist of tulle to match one's hair.

Mantle effects play an important part in the styles for the coming year, especially in wraps.

Ribbon rosettes, which are so popular on hats, are being employed with quite as much success on dressy gowns.

The fashion of draping the hat brim with fringe is a pretty one and a fashion which will be taken up late this winter.

Very dressy lace and crepe waists are trimmed with the narrowest bands of fine fur, such as sable, ermine, and chinchilla.

Tailors and dressmakers are turning out more black cloth costumes than ever, and they are for both old and young women.